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ABSTRACT

This study investigates "burn-out" and turnover among workers in child care settings. A total of 95 persons working in 32 child care centers in San Francisco were interviewed by telephone. One-fifth of the centers in the city were represented and both public and private centers were included. Each category of center was proportionately represented and centers were randomly selected within each category. Scaled interview items provided data on training, experience and education of staff, job responsibilities, wages, hours of paid and unpaid work, benefits, center structure, adult to child ratio, break and substitute policy, frequency of meetings and topics discussed, and how decisions were made in centers. Open-ended questions sought to ascertain sources of tension and satisfaction, frequency and reasons for turnover, and changes staff would like to see in their centers. Information about center budgets and sources of funding was solicited separately from center administrators. Major findings are reported in summary form. Essentially, the data confirm the commonly held assumption that child care staff are underpaid and overworked, and suggest that the high rate of turnover and "burn-out" of child care personnel is linked to working conditions and job satisfaction based on job title, funding source and length of program day. Suggestions for changes within and beyond the child care center are made. (Author/PH)

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Who's Minding The Child Care Workers?: A Look At Staff Burn-out

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Child Care Staff Education Project¹

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Since the mid 1960's there has been a tremendous increase in the number of women who work outside the home. Thirty-five percent of these women have children under the age of six.² The supply of adult supervised, affordable child care is woefully inadequate, and the lack of sufficient services has been the focus of much agitation and advocacy.

In addressing the need for more child care, many advocates stress the importance of providing quality services for the crucial early years. Discussions concerning quality child care among early childhood personnel, parents, and legislators commonly focus on such issues as adult to child ratio, parent involvement, and curriculum. Although varied and difficult to evaluate, educational curricula that enhance cognitive, physical, social and emotional growth are accepted as the major ingredient of quality care. Parent involvement programs that respect the cultural background of families are also labeled as a key aspect of quality care. Finally, a low ratio of children to adults allows for individualized attention and has thus been considered a critical variable of quality services.³

Rarely is the caregiver's experience in his/her job considered an important component of quality care. Yet the impact of adult's experiences on children's lives is assumed by most people. Tense, overworked or ill parents, it is argued, will be hampered in their ability to parent effectively. Although the relationship between child care staff and children is different in many ways from the parent-child relationship, the interrelationship between

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adult and child experience is nevertheless important. A stressed child care worker will likely be hampered in the ability to provide quality care.⁴

Little research has been conducted so far which reveals exactly who child care workers are, and how they experience their work. The National Day Care Study provides some critical information. Workers in the field are primarily female and under forty years of age. Despite considerable education and training, child care workers earn close to or less than the minimum wage.⁵ The turnover at most child care centers is 15-30% a year which exceeds the national average of 10% for most human services fields.⁶

Informal observations reveal even more disturbing facts. Many child care staff appear to be stressed and overworked. Each year the exit of many trained and committed workers from the field gnaws away at the morale of those left behind. Burn-out, the phenomenon whereby one loses interest in and energy for one's work, is the current focus of much debate:

The mention of "burn-out" in most gatherings of child care workers provokes immediate and intense discussion. Staff meetings, parties and after-work bull sessions abound with both symptoms of and conversation about burn-out. It is a term that is intuitively grasped and accepted and at the same time a phenomenon about which there is little precise understanding. Freudenberger recently described the "burn-out syndrome" as exhaustion resulting from excessive demands on energy, strength or resources. It is a painful and debilitating response to work pressures, which child care workers immediately find familiar.

The conditions leading to burn-out can be viewed from three different perspectives: 1) the nature of the work, 2) the personality types of child care workers, 3) the structural components of centers. Freudenberger and Mattingly suggest that it is the nature of the work itself that causes the condition.⁸ As with other human services, the necessarily intensive interaction between worker and client (i.e., adult and child) is thought to become more draining and less gratifying over time. In this view a solution to burn-

out involves diversifying the type of work people in centers perform so that there are breaks from constant direct work with children.

Freudenberger, Reed, and Sutton contend that those who enter the field have personality types which lead them to burn-out.⁹ Staff are seen as people with personal, often unconscious, needs to come to terms with their own troubled childhood experiences. It is argued that these workers enter child care settings to solve their personal problems and when they are unsuccessful they "burn-out". A variation of this position suggests that people who engage in this work are idealistic and highly motivated to improve conditions for young children. But they "burn-out" because they do not have a realistic sense of their own strengths and abilities to create positive change.¹⁰ The cure based on this analysis involves a refocus of training to include more self awareness and perhaps counseling opportunities.

Maslach and Pines identify the structural components influential in causing or alleviating burn-out.¹¹ They find that lower ratios of adults to children, more dependable breaks and substitute policies and better communication positively affect one's experience and therefore one's ability to perform the job with less stress.

Although each of the views articulated above contribute to an understanding of burn-out, there appears to be more to the story. Our experience as child care staff suggests that working conditions, particularly low pay, lack of benefits and unpaid overtime, contribute significantly to one's job satisfaction. Furthermore, working conditions in most occupations are closely tied to one's job title as well as to the source of funding. In this light we wondered whether the phenomena of burn-out and turnover occur at different rates among staff of different levels and at different centers.

Current Study

The limited information available about child care staff has frequently been based on information gleaned through observation. We have little direct knowledge of the experience and perceptions of those who actually do the work. During the fall of 1978 and winter 1979, 95 staff people working in 32 child care centers in San Francisco were interviewed. One-fifth of the total centers in the city were represented. Included were both half day and full day programs. Public centers included those run by the school district as well as those receiving other public monies such as Headstart. Private centers included both non-profit and proprietary centers. Each category of center was proportionately represented and centers were randomly selected within each category.

Initial contacts were made by letter to the selected centers. If the response to the letter was positive, a visit was made to the center. During a staff meeting the purpose of the survey was explained and appointments were made for interviews to take place. As many staff persons were skeptical of participating if there was any possibility of their superiors having access to their responses, we guaranteed confidentiality. For this reason interviews were conducted over the phone, after working hours.

The interview consisted of open-ended and scaled items. Scaled items were used to ascertain information about the following topics: training, experience and education of staff, job responsibilities, wages, hours of paid and unpaid work, benefits, center structure, adult to child ratio, break and substitute policy, frequency of meetings and topics discussed, and how decisions were made in centers. Open-ended questions sought to ascertain sources of tension and satisfaction, frequency and reasons for turnover, and changes staff would like to see in their centers. Information about center budgets

and sources of funding was solicited separately from center administrators.

To facilitate exposition, the major findings will be reported in summary form. The actual statistical analyses will not be included.¹²

Results and Discussion

Sample Composition

One-third of the staff interviewed were head teachers/director, one-third were teachers, and one-third were aides or teaching assistants. Although the head teacher/directors did perform some administrative functions, all spent a considerable time with children. Eighty-nine percent (89%) of the people interviewed were female. This is slightly lower than the percentage of females performing the work nationally.¹³ Half of those interviewed were ethnic minorities, most of whom held aide or assistant positions.

The National Day Care Study (NDCS) found that 54% of child care staff had completed some post secondary education.¹⁴ However, 96% of our sample had completed some college work. Seventy percent (70%) had earned a bachelor's degree with 45% completing some coursework beyond their degree. Seventeen percent (17%) had earned a Master's degree. A high level of experience had also been accumulated by our subjects. Seventy percent (70%) had worked in the field for three years or more and 56% had been working in child care for over five years. Only 5% had been in the field for less than a year.

Wages, Benefits and Hours

Wages. The National Day Care Study (NDCS) found low average wages for child care staff. In 1978 head teachers and teacher's aides were reported to earn \$7,180 and \$4,940 a year respectively for full-time work.¹⁵ We predicted that our sample would earn considerably more than the national average for several reasons. Our sample was exclusively from an urban California community, a setting known for a considerable degree of public financial support for

child care. We also expected higher wages because our sample included more highly educated subjects than those in the NCDS. Finally we anticipated higher earnings due to our subject's previous experience in the field.

While our data did reveal higher wages than the national average, the results placed these workers at the lower 10% of adult wage earners.¹⁶ Over twenty-nine percent (29.4%) of staff grossed \$500 or less per month. About thirty-two percent (32.6%) earned between \$500-800 per month. Almost nineteen percent (18.9%) were salaried at \$800-1,000 per month. Only 14% grossed over \$1,000 per month. It should be noted that gross income is a misleading indicator of what people live on in an inflating economy.¹⁷

The bases for salary differentials emerged in a clear pattern. Two-fifths of staff in privately funded centers--as compared to one-fifth of staff in publicly funded centers--had gross earnings of \$500 or less a month. Staff in publicly funded centers were also more likely to earn the highest wages.

However, publicly funded programs were not all the same. The only staff to net over \$800 a month were found in public school centers. This difference is linked to several factors--notably unionization and the winning of parity in pay and benefits with elementary school teachers for those staff classified as teachers.¹⁸ These public school employees were the only unionized employees in our sample and are among the few currently unionized child care personnel nationwide.¹⁹

Job classifications further served as a basis for wage differentials in our sample. Whereas approximately a quarter (24% and 27% respectively) of teachers and head teacher/directors took home \$500 or less each month, two-thirds of aides and teaching assistants did. Although aides had less formal education than teachers and head teachers/directors, 88% of aides in our sample had some college courses.

A curious result in respect to hours further underscores the wage difference between public and private programs. There was no significant difference in how much people earned based on whether they worked in a full- or part-day program. However, part-day programs often required a shorter work day (six hours as compared to eight hours). The majority of our sample working in part-day programs worked in public facilities, such as community colleges, which tend to pay a relatively high salary equivalent to salaries in full-day programs.

Finally, wages are further reduced by the recurring and informal process of workers personally purchasing supplies for their centers. Over half of those interviewees reported that their center supply budget was inadequate. Sixty percent (60%) of surveyed staff contribute from one to ten dollars each month of their own money for supplies.

Hours. The low pay and minimal benefits of child care work do not reflect a short work week. On the contrary, most of the staff in our sample worked several hours without pay each week in addition to their full-time jobs. Almost half of those interviewed received no compensation for extra hours they worked and many reported that even when there was a method for compensation--such as taking off time at a later date or extra pay--it was often impossible to actualize.

We asked people to estimate how much time they spent in curriculum preparation and planning, meetings, parent contact and center support/maintenance. We then asked them to estimate the amount of time for which they were paid. Seventy-two percent (72%) reported spending time outside of regular paid hours with 58% reporting that they spend thirty minutes or more each work day. This was true in spite of the fact that almost three-quarters receive some daily paid preparation time.

Much communication between parents and staff appeared to occur during unpaid hours. Only 39% of staff were paid for their work with parents. Forty-five percent reported spending unpaid extra time. Communication between staff also occurred during nonpaid hours. Only 48% of staff in our sample reported being paid for staff meetings. Sixty-five percent (65%) reported spending unpaid time in meetings.

There are numerous chores that are essential to center operation but which are hard to classify. These include thorough cleanings, rearranging or building new equipment, and fundraising. Forty-four percent (44%) of those interviewed reported spending between one to 15 hours of unpaid time a month in performing such duties. Twenty-six (26%) reported that their job and/or its quality mandated such participation. In other words, without fundraising, there was not enough money for the centers to run smoothly or even, in extreme cases, for people to be paid.

Benefits. Benefits are a major vehicle for supplementing wages. We anticipated not only limited benefits, but also that staff with the lowest wages would receive the fewest benefits. Benefits were least likely to be received by aides and staff in privately funded centers, in effect, those staff most needing additional income. Almost half of our sample received no medical coverage through their job. Two-thirds of the sample who received medical benefits only received partial coverage. Public employees were most likely to receive medical coverage as well as to have a choice of medical plan. Public school staff were even more likely to receive a choice than staff from other public programs. The vast majority of staff in our sample (71%) received no dental coverage through their jobs. The few who did receive coverage were most likely to be teachers in the public centers, especially the public school centers. In over 70% of the cases, dependents were not covered

for either medical or dental expenses.

Paid sick time, holidays, vacations or professional enrichment days constitute other forms of benefit. Again we anticipated that the lowest paid staff receiving fewest benefits would also receive the fewest paid days off. As the examples that follow indicate, this was the case. Staff in public centers received more paid holidays than staff in private centers. However, not all private centers were the same. Staff in proprietary centers were even less likely than staff in nonprofit private centers to receive paid days off. The average number of paid holidays fell between seven and twelve a year for our sample. Two to four weeks paid vacation was granted to slightly less than half of our sample. Longer vacations were most likely to be received by public center staff.

Leaves of absence can be used by workers for emergencies or to supplement vacations. Staff in our sample were largely unaware of their centers' policy in this regard. Leaves were available for about two-fifths of the staff. People working in public programs, head teachers/directors, and teachers as compared to aides were most likely to have this option. Maternity leave was available to 49% of female staff interviewed. Sixty-four percent (64%) received some pay while on leave. Paternity leave was available to 50% of men interviewed. Only one man reported that he could be paid for this leave. Barely a third of staff interviewed received paid professional enrichment days. Aides were least likely to be included in that grouping.

Child care workers are constantly exposed to colds, the flu, and other minor illnesses. Thus, paid sick days are of critical importance if staff are to stay home while ill. Sixteen percent (16%) of the staff in our survey did not receive any paid sick days. Sixty-five percent (65%) received 9-12 a year and 16% received more than one a month. Employees in proprietary centers were

least likely to receive paid sick days.

Job Structure

Breaks. By law, California workers are entitled to a fifteen minute paid break for every four hours of work. In actuality, the situation is quite different. More than a third (37%) of the staff in our study failed to receive a paid break. A small number (5%) received an unpaid break. Thus, over a quarter of staff received no paid or unpaid break for every four hours of work. Staff working in privately funded centers were most likely to be in this category. Moreover, 39% of those receiving paid breaks found them inadequate. This was because there was no time to take breaks or there was not enough staff to cover them. In only two-fifths of the cases did staff feel there was always enough staff to cover for breaks.

Adult-Child Ratio

The National Day Care Study found optimal adult-child ratios to range from 1 to 5 to 1 to 10. No quality of care differences were noted within this range.²⁰ In our sample 35% of staff worked in centers with a ratio of over 1 to 10. The majority of private proprietary centers in our sample (78%) had ratios of 1 to 11 or more. Although two-thirds of the staff in our sample worked in centers with so-called high ratios of adults to children, 57% felt that their center ratio only occasionally allowed for individual work with children.

Job Responsibilities and Decision-Making

While preparing the questionnaire we had numerous discussions with child care staff about the sources of job tension. Story after story was recounted about staff tensions connected to unclear or unfair job title distinctions. For example many aides felt they did as much curriculum planning as the teachers. Yet they received no paid preparation time, while the teacher

did. Or, the teaching staff believed that they were being included in a hiring decision only to find their input disregarded.

Few centers had formal, written policies on any of these concerns. Furthermore, formal policy is not often a true indicator of what actually occurs or what people experience as significant. Thus, we decided to ask staff for their perception of what was included in their job responsibilities and how much time they spent performing these responsibilities. We also asked staff about their role in a variety of decision making situations in order to ascertain power and authority lines. We understood we would be getting results from only one vantage point, but hoped this particular perspective would give insight into much of the tension which impedes the successful operation of many centers.

Our results in respect to job responsibilities by job title suggest one possible explanation for the frequent bitterness encountered in centers around questions of the division of labor. Job title appears to give very little information about the types of tasks performed by staff of different rank. There were no differences in the range of duties reported by aides, teachers or teacher-directors. All engaged in the following activities to some degree: curriculum planning and implementation, meal preparation, maintenance, parent communications, clerical and administrative tasks. There were differences, however, in how much time staff with different titles spent performing each task. Directors/head teachers were more likely to spend time in clerical and administrative chores and parent communications. However, job title reflected no differences in paid or unpaid time spent in curriculum planning and implementation, maintenance and meal preparation. So, while the job title gave little concrete information regarding what tasks people actually performed, it did reflect differences in pay, benefits and educational

level.

However, an interviewee's job title was likely to give concrete information about input and involvement in major policy as well as in day-to-day decisions. Major policy decisions included hiring and firing, center enrollment, budget, parent, staff and community relations, administrative structure, and determination of working conditions. Day-to-day decisions, those needed for the actual work with children, include: setting up and cleaning up activities, grouping of children, appropriate discipline, daily communication with parents, indoor and outdoor supervision, scheduling and a procedure for division of staff responsibilities. All teaching staff had significantly less power and control in the former set of decisions than did center administrators. Only 18% of teaching staff were included in major decision making.

Differences between teaching staff still emerged. One-third of head teachers/directors were included in governing bodies while less than one-quarter of teachers and fewer than one-fifth of aides were. Thus the majority of child care staff were employed within a hierarchical decision making structure. Over half said they were dissatisfied with their arrangement because they found decision makers often ill informed and/or insensitive to the ramifications of their decisions.

In contrast to major policy decision making, teachers tended to have much more involvement in day-to-day decisions. Seventy percent (70%) of teachers made these decisions as did 66% of head teachers/directors. The decreased involvement of head teachers/directors in this area probably reflects their increased involvement with tasks which removed them from direct work with children. However, though teachers and aides spent equal time with children, only thirty-seven percent (37%) of the aides were involved in making day-to-day decisions. Aides were dissatisfied with this procedure because their

input was disregarded despite their perceived parity in responsibility. Teachers, however, were pleased with their autonomy in this area of their jobs.

Job Satisfaction

Most studies locate job satisfaction in pay and benefits rather than in the nature of the work itself. Considering the low pay and poor benefits of child care workers, these are unlikely to be a major source of satisfaction. Furthermore, intense work with children and adults, the essence of child care work, has been claimed to fuel the turnover rate in the field.²¹ In contrast to this assertion, however, the vast majority of staff in our sample claimed the nature of the work itself as the major source of their job gratification. Seventy-eight percent (78%) reported that the direct work with children was what most engaged and pleased them about their jobs. Several aspects of this work were mentioned, including immediate feedback, physical contact, facilitating and observing growth and change, and related opportunities for self reflection. Staff mentioned other reasons relating to the nature of the work as sources of job satisfaction. In order of frequency these were: staff relations, flexibility and autonomy of job, and opportunity to learn and grow while working. Learning how to communicate with and depend on each other was encouraged by the many opportunities to problem solve within a context of shared purpose. Flexibility and autonomy were linked to the degree of control over day-to-day decision making and the fact that no two days are alike in child care. Staff gained a sense of competence and felt they were learning from dealing with continually arising issues. Aides, who were less involved in decision making were, not surprisingly, least likely to state this as a reason for satisfaction. Staff working in proprietary centers were least likely to claim they were learning and growing on the job.

But what of the considerable dissatisfaction which is reflected in the high rate of turnover and the urgency with which discussions of burn-out are conducted in child care circles? In order to identify the reasons behind job dissatisfaction, we asked people to state both what they liked least about their job and what were the sources of tension. In both cases, one cluster of responses emerged: low pay and unpaid hours--what we label overwork and underpayment.

There were other, if less pressing, reasons for job dissatisfaction: staff relations, children, maintenance and division of responsibilities. While staff relations were also cited as a source of satisfaction, close working conditions sometimes served to exacerbate differences in educational philosophy and/or personal values. Those who are lower on center hierarchies, teachers and aides, were twice as likely as head teachers/directors to state that staff relations were a distasteful part of their jobs. This may reflect their relative lack of power and input in determining staff policies.

Maslach and Pines found that job structure greatly impacts on child care staff in terms of job satisfaction and/or the tendency to burn-out.²³ In our sample, staff-child ratio, hours of direct work with children, breaks mechanisms for input and flexibility of center structure all were correlated with staff perception of job satisfaction. It would also appear that the perception of children as tension producing is somehow linked to center structure and working conditions. Only 5% of staff in part-day programs mentioned children as a source of tension whereas 22% of staff in full-day programs made this statement. Public center staff were least likely to list children as a source of tension with private proprietary staff most likely to experience children in this way.

Maintenance was frequently mentioned as a distasteful aspect of child

care work. Perhaps this reflects a conflict of expectations for people with relatively high levels of education. They did not assume after college their work would involve cleaning, washing dishes, and food preparation.

Private center employees were more likely than public center employees to feel some tension on their jobs. Proprietary center staff were even more likely than private nonprofit staff to experience tension. Full-day program staff were more likely than half-day staff to say they experienced tension.

Head teachers/directors were more likely than aides or teachers to say they experienced tension in relation to their jobs. The reasons for this are hard to pinpoint. One hint comes from the tendency of head teachers/directors to list diversity of responsibility as a source of tension. This suggests that it may be tied to the additional responsibilities that accompany increased power. If something goes wrong, they are likely to be held accountable. Furthermore, in many cases, their pay and benefits were not significantly higher than teachers, though they often had more training and experience. Thus, their tensions may reflect conflict about career expectations. Although head teachers/directors had more input into major policy making than other staff, they were frequently excluded from decision making bodies.

Job Security and Turnover

The National Day Care Study stated that the turnover rate at centers averaged 15% a year.²³ We were unclear as to whether the rate for our sample would be higher or lower due to the interplay of conflicting forces such as high educational levels coupled with cutbacks.

Staff in our sample tended to switch centers often. Over two-thirds (70%) of staff had been in the field for three years or more. Yet over a third (37%) had been at their jobs for less than a year. One-fifth of staff interviewed had been at their jobs for less than six months. While 54% had

been in the field for five years or more, only 17% had been in their centers that long.

Job structure and working conditions appear to be associated with turnover. Turnover rates were lowest for staff in part-time programs, which in our sample tended to be staff with higher wages, better adult-child ratios and less tense work environments. Turnover rates were highest for staff in private proprietary centers, which are the ones with the highest ratios, worst reported working conditions, fewest benefits and most stated tension. The high degree of tension in proprietary centers may well be a response to the high turnover rate as well as a cause of it.

Staff perception of the causes of turnover confirms the above contention. Low pay and unpaid overtime were the most frequently cited reasons. Underpayment, as exemplified not only by low pay given educational levels but also lack of mobility, was a frequent reason given for turnover. Fifty-eight percent (58%) agreed with the statement that there was no opportunity for advancement in the job. Thus the field is filled with educated, trained and experienced people who have very little opportunity for securing better jobs. Thus, it is hardly surprising to find that 20% of those interviewed said they expected to leave the field in the next year. Only 24% see themselves as making a lifetime commitment to work in the field. A related reason commonly stated for turnover was the relative insecurity of the field in general. Cutbacks or threats of such were seen as undercutting people's ability to stay at any one job.

Staff Recommendations

We asked people what changes they would make in their work situation. One cluster of responses again emerged as overwhelmingly important: higher pay, more benefits, increased job security, and career mobility. Other

commonly stated changes included better staff/child ratios and more control over policy and day-to-day decision making.

Recommendations and Conclusions

The data generated by this study revealed information about working conditions and job structure as well as job satisfaction and job classifications. Essentially, our data confirmed the commonly held assumption that child care staff are underpaid and overworked. Furthermore, it indicated differences with respect to working conditions and job satisfaction based on job title, funding source and length of program day. In addition our data suggest that the frequently cited high rate of turnover and burn-out of child care personnel is intricately tied to these working conditions.

The results of our study suggest a new understanding of how an enthusiastic and hopeful worker gradually loses her/his eagerness and becomes fatigued, irritable, and likely to quit. We recognize burn-out as a complex process influenced by the interplay of many factors, including the intense nature of the work, the personality tendencies of people attracted to the field, and the specific structure of child care centers. However, our research indicates that burn-out is less an intrinsic element of the child care worker's personality or activity, and more a function of the context in which the work itself is performed. By context we include not only the particular structure of a given institution but also the larger social forces affecting institutional policy. These social forces include available monies, resources, and prevailing attitudes toward programs and caretakers.

Staff in our sample consistently raised these contextual issues as key to their understanding of burn-out and efforts to reduce it. They repeatedly labeled their working conditions--long hours, low pay, lack of benefits, mobility and job security--as responsible for their dissatisfaction, frustra-

tion, and inability to make long terms commitments to their jobs. Constant threat of cutbacks for public employees and the high unemployment rate for teachers were also mentioned as feeding feelings of hopelessness about improving their situation.

The nature of child care work may aggravate the tendency to burn-out in low paying and low status jobs. However, our sample found the nature of the work to be very satisfying. It attracts and engages people who otherwise would seek more status and better salaried employment. We are not suggesting that higher wages, more benefits, and better adult-child ratios will alone eliminate the burn-out and turnover in the field. But in view of the responses of those we interviewed, as well as our own experience, we think it is the area in which to begin making changes.

Many who read this may agree that working conditions need to be improved but will argue that in time of economic recession such improvements are not possible. We agree that given limited resources it is necessary to differentiate between changes that can be made in working conditions which demand immediate funds and those which do not. The suggestions which follow are made with the acknowledgement that more money is both needed for this human service and hard to obtain.

Changes Within Centers

Previously cited studies of burn-out in child care have made valuable suggestions for changes that would alleviate some stress currently experienced by staff. These include such things as introducing a greater variety of tasks, reduction of the number of hours working directly with children, increased vehicles for peer support and communication between staff, and the establishment of small "familial groups" within larger centers.²⁴ Three additional changes suggest themselves from our survey:

1) Increased Staff Involvement in Decision-Making. As Freudenberger and Seiderman have noted, and our results confirm, staff with more input and involvement in decision-making appear to be more satisfied with their jobs.²⁵ Being able to make suggestions and to use one's skills to solve problems is a potentially positive aspect of child care work. Vehicles for teaching staff input and mechanisms to inform administrative staff of the implication of their decisions should be developed. Involving staff on policy-making boards and in such decision as hiring will address the former concern. An ongoing evaluation process which assesses both staff and administration is needed. However, for such an evaluation process to be effective, lower level staff must be guaranteed "immunity" when sharing their impressions to protect themselves. A well functioning grievance policy written into staff contracts is basic to developing more open involvement of staff.

2) Job Title Distinctions. In this study we found that aides, teachers, and head teachers/directors all engage in the same duties despite differences in job title. The distinctions in responsibility based on job title were related more to quantity of time spent performing tasks rather than the tasks themselves. Someone with a Master's degree in child development did maintenance work, and aides were involved in curriculum planning and parent conferences. Much tension in centers revolves around conflicts over distinctions in title and pay without equal distinction in the actual work performed. This suggests that centers reexamine their structure. Are the divisions in job title based on skill and experience differences? Or do the distinctions reflect the lack of mobility in a field which values on-the-job training but which is unable to offer upward mobility in terms of pay? Open examination of these questions and the problems they reflect will not generate more funds. But it may spark ideas about how to equalize the limited resources that

exist. At the very least there will be an opportunity for a shared recognition of inequities, and an opportunity for people to be valued for their skills.

3) Break and Substitute Policy. The provision of breaks and sick days is related to adequate funds. However, attitudes of staff and administration can greatly affect break and substitute policy. Frequently people feel, or are made to feel by others, that the need for a break or staying home "with only a cold" are signs of weakness or lack of commitment. Acknowledgement of the value of breaks and staying home when ill can lead to greater staff and administrative cooperation. Slight adjustments in scheduling can enable people to have their fifteen minute breaks. A substitute policy agreed upon by all staff members and which does not leave arrangements to the sick staff member or the person on the floor is a useful first step.

Changes Beyond the Center

Child care is expensive and the major cost is staffing. Estimates are that 70 to 90% of a center budget goes to salaries. Parents using services are unfortunately already strapped for money. Currently, many women pay almost as much for child care as they earn.²⁶ Thus, to meet the needs of child care staff for a decent income and of parents for affordable services, either government or industry will have to provide subsidies.

Those who argue that proprietary care can address the needs of families without subsidy (the so-called tax paying child care) have overlooked the deplorable conditions of child care staff in many of those centers. In our sample, proprietary center staff earned significantly less and had fewer benefits than workers in other private or public centers. In addition, they experienced less satisfaction and had a higher turnover rate. These centers typically allot between 50 to 60% of their budget to salaries. One center in

our sample allotted 25% of its \$100,000 budget to salaries. The owners' share of the profit was 36% of the budget.

One aspect of obtaining more financial support for child care involves changing the prevailing view that child care is unskilled work. The Department of Labor publishes the Dictionary of Occupational Titles, the most comprehensive source listing for employers establishing job qualifications and payscales. It lists 30,000 job titles in terms of complexity in three areas-- data, people and tasks. Zero is the highest level of complexity and eight, the lowest. Nursery school teachers received a rating of 8 (tasks), 7 (people), and 8 (data); the same rating as the given parking lot attendants.²⁷

As long as child care work is considered unskilled, this will be reflected in its pay and status. But why is it considered unskilled? Certainly those performing these tasks do not consider it so. Eighty-two percent (82%) of staff interviewed thought they were continually growing and changing on their jobs, while 60% of them were already "overqualified" by hiring criteria. Rather, as one staff member said, "It's women's work and so nobody sees it as important." Child care staff must work to change public attitudes about women and the work they have traditionally performed. They must reaffirm the value of our human resources and thus raise the status of those who care for the next generation.

Thus, already overworked staff must join together and let people know about the value and skill level of their labor. This involves writing to the Department of Labor. It includes informing legislators and policy-makers of work conditions and defining minimum employment standards which need to be included in future legislation and recommended by public agencies assisting employers. It requires pressuring organizations which represent child care staff, like the National Association for the Education of Young Children, to

focus more of their resources on working conditions. Goals here might be directing the internal debate of the organization around these issues and possible solutions, as well as attempting to offer services (such as health insurance) to the membership. Finally, people might create organizations to help share ideas about break and sub policy, contracts, and generally offer support. Beyond these specific tasks, the object must also be to raise public consciousness and make child care a national concern and priority.

To ameliorate the situation which leads to burn-out, parents, staff and child advocates require a strategy which distinguishes factors which can be changed within existing institutions with their current resources and factors which involve efforts outside of their particular centers. Such a strategic orientation can be an important first step in confronting an enormous problem. Tackling burn-out by reassessing a center's existing organization can be time consuming and initially awkward. But it often has the effect of energizing the staff and improving work relations by helping people to see the origins of the problem outside their own personal inadequacies. It can prove to be a valuable beginning in addressing the larger tasks which face the field--publicizing and legitimizing child care work and allocating to it the social resources it needs and deserves.

References

¹The Child Care Staff Education Project is a nonprofit organization formed to study issues and to share information affecting child care workers. The current project began in 1977 when individuals from a variety of disciplines, including early childhood education, developmental psychology, social work and environmental planning, formulated a questionnaire which sought to directly reveal the experiences and opinions of child care workers about their jobs.

Several local groups and many individuals encouraged this study through their contribution of energy, skills, supplies, and use of equipment. Without their assistance, the study would not have been possible. Thanks to: East Bay Workers in Child Care, Interview Committee of the Child Care Staff Education Project, San Francisco Child Care Switchboard, Bananas, Parents and Workers United for Child Care, Bay Area Staff of the National Jury Project, and the University of California, Davis. Special thanks to the child care workers who shared their experiences with us. There are many individuals in the groups mentioned above who deserve personal thanks but space does not permit listing them all.

²Grossman, A. "Children of working mothers" Monthly Labor Review, June 1977.

³Some people now feel that total group size as opposed to ratio is a more significant determinant of quality. See Apt Associates, Children at the Center. Final Report of the National Day Care Study. Cambridge, Massachusetts. March 1979.

⁴See, for example: Freudenberger, H. J. "Burn-Out: Occupational Hazard of the Child Care Worker." Child Care Quarterly, Summer 1977; Maslach, C. and A. Pines. "The Burn-Out Syndrome in the Day Care Setting." Child Care Quar-

terly, Summer 1977; Reed, Michael J. "Stress in Live-In Child Care." Child Care Quarterly, Summer 1977; Sutton, B. "Consideration of Career Time in Child Care Work: Observations on Child Care Work Experiences." Child Care Quarterly, Summer 1977.

⁵Apt Associates, op. cit.

⁶Seiderman, Stanley. Combatting Staff Burn-Out. Day Care and Early Education, Summer 1978.

⁷Mattingly, M. Introduction to Symposium: Stress and Burn-Out in Child Care." Child Care Quarterly, Summer 1977.

⁸Freudenberger, op. cit.; Mattingly, M. "Sources of Stress and Burn-out in Professional Child Care Work." Child Care Quarterly, Summer 1977. See also: Maslach, M. and A. Pines, op. cit.; Reed, op. cit.; Sutton, op. cit. and Seiderman, op. cit. The three views are presented in simplified form. Many analyses include some combination of these three orientations.

⁹Freudenberger, op. cit.; Sutton, op. cit.; Reed, op. cit. See also Maslach and Pines, op. cit.; Mattingly, loc. cit.; Sutton, op. cit.; Seiderman, op. cit.

¹⁰Nida, Pat. "Super-Teacher, Super Burn-Out." Presentation at National Association for the Education of Young Children Conference. Atlanta, Georgia, 1979.

¹¹Maslach and Pines, op. cit. See also Seiderman, op. cit.

¹²Results are significant according to standard statistical tests. Chi-squares ($p = .05$) were performed when comparing differences within sub groups in the sample. More detailed information of statistical analyses can be obtained from The Child Care Staff Education Project, 384 63rd Street, Oakland, California, 94618.

¹³Apt Associates, op. cit.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics: Employment Perspective: Working Women. Report No. 574, No. 2, Second Quarter 1979.

¹⁷San Francisco has one of the highest standards of living in the country which suggests that higher wages may be less a reflection of high educational and experience level and more a result of regional salary schedules.

¹⁸Regretably, since the completion of our interviews there has been a tremendous change in the situation of S. F. public school child care staff. Proposition 13 resulted in layoffs of approximately 75% of those staff classified as teachers. Teachers have been replaced by aides who earn \$3.84 an hour with no benefits. Some of the laid-off teachers were rehired in their former jobs as aides.

¹⁹For more information about unionization and child care write to BADWU, Boston Area Day Care Workers United, Somerville, Mass. The union, American Federation of Teachers, was effective in winning better working conditions for child care staff. Even the aides in the children's center earn more than the usual aide wage of \$3.50 an hour or less, but child care personnel were clearly not the union priority once faced with crisis. Thus, child care positions were sacrificed for elementary positions and tenured elementary teachers have been given center positions at the expense of early childhood trained personnel.

²⁰Apt Associates, op. cit.

²¹See footnote #8 for references on this point of view.

²²Maslach and Pines, op. cit.

²³Apt Associates, op. cit.

²⁴See, for example: Maslach and Pines, op. cit. Seiderman, op. cit. and

Freudenberger, op. cit.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Parents and Workers United for Child Care, Who Cares for the Children? Slideshow available through St. Patrick's Day Care Center, 332 Clementina, San Francisco, California.

²⁷Department of Labor. Dictionary of Occupational Titles. University of Wisconsin, 1976.